(iii) Need for Early Probe into illicit traffic in Indian antiques by London-based art auction house

[*English*]

SHRI BIJOY HANDIQUE (JORHAT): Sir, the recent revelations that the world famous London-based art auction house of Sotheby's is involved in illicit traffic in Indian antiques are terribly shocking and shows to what an extent culture is commercialised.

What is tragic is that had there been no exposer by Mr. Peter Watson in his book "Sotheby's; Inside story" followed by the Times newspaper's serialisation and the B.B.C. Channel 4 documentary on the sale of smuggled pieces giving the names of the art dealers of Mumbai and even recording their voices how they sold the art objects clandestinely, supported by Sotheby's internal documents, this cultural plunder would not have shocked the conscience of the people of the world and would have petered out to a tame complaint voiced occasionally by the Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I.). For, such complaints, not supported by any firm evidence, date back to 1986, if not earlier. Since no follow up action was taken in the wake of the rule that export of items more than one hundred years old was banned from India, Indian artifacts sneaked into the hands of acquisitive curators, rapacious collectors and thieving art dealers. It is shameful that those racketeers are our own people. Not only that, there is an allegation that diplomatic bags or the diplomats are also conduits for this antique smuggling.

I urge upon the Government to hold a probe into this racket as promptly as done by the trade and commerce department of British Government in the wake of these revelations in the United Kingdom.

(iv) Need to Release more funds for providing relief to the people affected by acute drought in Orissa

SHRI ANADI CHARAN SAHU (CUTTACK): Sir, there is acute drought situation in Orissa. The matter was discussed in the Parliament during the third session. Hon. Agriculture Minister and the hon. Prime Minister promised to release Rs. 220 crore to ameliorate the conditions of the affected people. Unfortunately, only Rs. 13 crore were released and that too from the Relief Fund.

In the meanwhile the harvesting has been over and it has been found that 28 out of 30 districts of Orissa have sustained become cropless ranging from 50 to 74 per cent, 28,953 villages are affected by drought. The immediate requirement is provision of drinking water, employment to the affected people and sanction of short-term loans in the Agriculture sector. Government of India may take immediate steps for release of Rs. 187 crore under the E.A.S. Scheme and for short-terms assistance to the affected villages.

(v) Need to Improve the Functioning of Telephones in Rural Areas, Particularly in Sunderbans Area, West Bengal

SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL (JOYNAGAR): Sir, it is a matter of deep concern that while Government in its anxiety to improve the living conditions in the rural areas, particularly where *Gram Panchayats* are working, introduced with much enthusiasm the Multi Access Rural Radio system (MARR). Unfortunately the Department of Telecommunications and its functionaries in the States could not ensure that this line of communication was efficiently maintained. In my constituency, Sunderbans area in West Bengal, which is renowned for its unique flora and fauna and bio-diversity, the whole system is in utter shambles. My area falls under Canning and GOSABA Telephone exchanges and I am revealing a very startling situation that telephones in most of the *Gram Panchayats* are dead since June, 1995. It is a pity that it is nobody's concern.

I request the hon. Minister of Communications to take note of this alarming and somewhat fantastic situation and ensure that telephones in *Gram Panchayats* not only in my constituency but also all over the country are well-maintained and any faults in their functioning should be eradicated immediately and these should be restored to normal working conditions, so that this paradoxical situation is balked down once for all.

(vi) Need to Connect Azamgarh in U.P. By Direct Train Service with other Important Cities

[Translation]

DR. BALIRAM (LALGANJ): Hon. Deputy Speaker, Sir I wish to draw attention of the Government through you, towards District Azamgarh of Uttar Pradesh. The people of this District are settled in Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, Assam and even abroad but these people have to face lot of difficulties due to lack of any direct rail services to Azamgarh. This is one of the main reasons for its backwardness. Local people and the public representatives of this area had been demanding since long that narrow line of Shahganj-Azamgarh-Mhow should be converted into a broad gauge line by the department of Railways. This work has already been completed but no rail service has been introduced on this line from Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Lucknow.

I, therefore, urge the central Government a long route Mail and Express train Services be introduced from Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow etc. for District Azamgarh so as to solve the problems of the people of this area.

(vii) Need to take over Nagapattinam Port in Tamil Nadu and to Develop it as a Major Port

[English]

SHRI M. SELVARASU (NAGAPATTINAM): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I raise the following matter under Rule 377.

The Nagapattinam port is one of the ancient and historical ports built by the Dutch. The export of leather, salt, dry fish and the import of onion, cement etc. were being carried out through this port. Lakhs of NRI citizens of Singapore, Malaysia and Burma visit their families in the adjoining districts. They used to visit India by sea which is their cheapest mode of transport.